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March 1973

DISCUSSION NOTES

I. In Indochina, the three most significant developments of the

past two weeks have been:

- A. Further political deterioration in Cambodia.
- B. A continued increase in Vietnamese Communist military capabilities in South Vietnam.
- C. A stall in progress on the Laos negotiations caused primarily by Communist foot-dragging.

II. In Cambodia, the already unhealthy political atmosphere has worsened as a result of the events of 17 March (the Palace bombing and the grenades thrown at the teacher/student demonstrations) and, particularly, the government's reactions to these events.

A. The government has chosen to construe 17 March's events as evidence of a "royalist plot."

1. This is Lon Non's thesis. It is a fabricated myth.

a. The Palace bombing was almost certainly the work of one disgruntled officer, not part of any elaborate conspiracy.

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b. The trouble at the teacher/student demonstrations was probably instigated by Lon Non himself.

B. Using the "plot" rationale, the government has cracked down hard on "oppositionists," i.e., Lon Non's real or potential rivals.

1. Sirik Matak is under house arrest and may be exiled.

2. The government's -- i.e., Lon Non's -- moves have probably erased any near-term hope for greater political unity and stability.

C. The military leadership now poses the only serious internal (i.e., non-Communist) threat to Lon Nol's authority.

1. Though all key senior officers, for various motives, are reluctant to contemplate a move against Lon Nol, many are apprehensive about Lon Non's growing power and concerned about what he may do to (a) the country's prospects and, even more, (b) them personally.

2. Nonetheless, at this moment no one seems willing to bell the cat.

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D. Lon Non's influence over Lon Nol is at an all time high.

1. So long as Lon Non rides high, the prospects are dim for any rapprochement between Lon Nol and other key figures such as Sirik Matak or In Tam.

2. Without such rapprochement, the chances for improved unity or cohesion within the GKR are dim.

3. Without improved unity and cohesion, the prospects for improved political stability or governmental effectiveness are even dimmer.

E. While the Phnom Penh leadership continues to splinter into increasingly hostile factions, the Khmer insurgents are keeping up their pressure in the countryside, particularly against key lines of communications.

1. The Khmer insurgents, even with some North Vietnamese stiffening, probably could not topple a tolerably unified and minimally effective Phnom Penh Government. If the latter continues to unravel, however, it will become progressively easier prey.

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III. In Vietnam, there has been little change in the level of military action, but Vietnamese Communist military capabilities continue to improve and we continue to get reports that a major Communist offensive is imminent.

(1) The Communist logistic resupply effort continues and though there has been some tapering off of supply movements in southern North Vietnam (or at least in our evidence of such movements), large quantities of goods are still on the move in the Laos Panhandle and in South Vietnam.

(2) We have seen no references to combat troops at the top of the personnel pipeline in North Vietnam since a 4 March indication that about 1,000 troops would depart on the 10th and 11th. The flow of specialist personnel, both civil and military, is continuing, however.

A. Hanoi's real intentions are hard to predict for several reasons.

1. The evidence available is not complete and much of it is ambiguous or subject to differing interpretations.

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2. More to the point, final decisions in this field have to be made, and orders issued, by the Hanoi Politburo -- a Chairmanless committee. The Politburo may well not have made up its own mind on what actual orders to issue.

B. The gut issue before the Politburo is the one it has been looking at and/or trying to fudge ever since last summer; the issue of basic priorities: protecting and building (or rebuilding) the Communist North versus "liberating" the non-Communist South.

1. Ideally, of course, the Politburo would like to do both. If at all possible, it will try to evade the hard choice of opting for one to the serious detriment of the other.

C. Strict adherence by Hanoi to all portions of the 17 January Paris Agreements would have been tantamount to abandoning the southern struggle. The morale and physical impact on the southern organization's prospects would have been disastrous if the Communists had:

1. Withdrawn their forces from Laos and Cambodia and thus shut off the southern organization's life support system.
2. Not replenished their southern organization's depleted personnel ranks.
3. Not augmented their southern organization's 27 January resource, logistic and supply inventory.

D. If it can possibly do so, the Politburo would like to structure a situation in which the Paris Agreements produce:

1. Total U.S. military disengagement and withdrawal.
2. Improved diplomatic opportunities and relationships for Hanoi, plus foreign -- including U.S. -- economic assistance on Hanoi's terms.
3. No real or major constraints on Hanoi's taking whatever actions it deems necessary to protect its southern equities and, at least over time, pursue its southern ambitions -- i.e., practical constraints about on a par

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with those imposed by the 1962 Geneva
Agreements on Laos.

E. At minimum, Hanoi's actions over the past two months
have been designed to

1. Improve its southern organization's
capabilities, particularly military capabilities.
2. Find out what the post-Paris traffic will bear,
i.e., how much discretionary latitude Hanoi
really has before the U.S. does anything
but grumble.

F. In the south, Hanoi has a twofold problem:

1. Communist prospects in a purely or
primarily political competition with the
GVN are not very bright.
2. The track record of the past six months
indicates that relatively small-scale
military action is not likely to give the
GVN many problems the latter cannot
handle.

G. As indicated earlier, Hanoi's intentions are obscure,
partly because the Politburo may not have made up its own

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mind. Such evidence as is available, however, strongly suggests that:

1. The Communists will engage in, or initiate, any military action they feel necessary to protect their present position.
2. They will probably try to improve that position over the next several months, stepping up the level of their military pressure in the course of this endeavor.
3. There is a serious chance -- say in the 25% range -- that they will launch a major offensive this spring.

IV. On Laos, negotiations are in a holding pattern because of Communist foot-dragging.

1. Hanoi's reasons for dictating a stall are not clear, but the Communists may not want the 60-day withdrawal clock to start running until they fry whatever fish they want to fry in South Vietnam.

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